

# New Year Brings Change for People and Businesses

By Bruce A. Love

Each New Year ushers in hope and change for many of us. We start new diets, quit smoking, or make other resolutions with the intention of making positive changes in our lives. Change is an inevitable part of life, and we can either initiate change ourselves, or react to changes in the world around us. To do otherwise is to resign ourselves to a future of want and despair.

Businesses experience and affect change too. Many changes occur in the market environment and can take the form of social, economic, legal, competitive, or technological forces. These external factors can either propel companies to stardom, or thrust businesses into bankruptcy. Companies that initiate and react to changes effectively will be here next year to face the challenges of 2006 and beyond.

Bickel's is a local treasure that thrives on change. This small surplus store has such high inventory turnover that customers can visit several times each week and see many different items each time. Their willingness to remain agile in the midst of market changes, and their skill at acquiring inexpensive marketable goods, is appealing to the store's devoted clientele.

Giant Eagle also has accepted the challenges of change. In response to the increased competition, Giant Eagle recently announced a rollback of prices and introduced the new Valu Time line of products. This line is targeted toward more price-conscious customers, and may actually keep customers from traveling to Wal-Mart to buy more for less. Giant Eagle also offers video rental, banking, pharmacies and floral shops in most locations. This one-stop shopping approach appeals to customers with limited free time.

Another local icon that has been proactive in its approach to change is Sheetz. From a technological standpoint, Sheetz appears to be on the cutting edge of buying convenience. They are dedicated to their mission "to continually improve the customers' shopping experience." In addition to their menu-driven made-to-order (MTO) terminals, Sheetz announced this week that they will become the first retailer in the nation to accept the new MasterCard PayPass this spring. The new

technology is designed to reduce the average purchasing time by 13%.

Not all change implemented by companies have resulted in consumer satisfaction and marketing success. In fact there have been some notable duds. In 1985, Coca-Cola introduced a new formula for Coke. Customers were incensed that the company would tamper with a product that had become part of Americana. It didn't matter that the "New Coke" beat Pepsi and the original Coca-Cola in blind taste tests! Customers can be fickle, and it is crucial that companies understand the peculiarities of their clientele. Coke, of course, listened to the public and returned the "Classic Coke" to store shelves where it was eagerly purchased by a grateful public.

When the local Sheetz stopped offering my favorite Dot'z soft gingerbread cookie, I was disappointed. But when they changed the roll on their MTO's recently, I was devastated. Coming from the Philadelphia area where we are known for steak sandwiches and hoagies ("subs" for those who hail from other parts of the state), I feel I have some credentials to assess the quality of a sandwich. When I had moved to this region, I was concerned that I would become one of the pathetic displaced Philadelphians that had to have good sandwiches shipped to them by family and friends who remained in eastern Pennsylvania. I was pleasantly surprised, however, when I bought my first Sheetz hoagie in September of 2000. I even took visiting friends and family to experience the Sheetz sandwiches. We all agreed that Sheetz hoagies matched the quality of those made in Philly!

No other ingredient contributes more to a hoagie or steak sandwich than the roll. If you like the dry flaky rolls currently being tested in the 14 stores in Blair County, you will be happy to learn that Sheetz plans to distribute these crusty creations to all of their 306 stores located in 6 Middle Atlantic States. If, however, you have developed a sophisticated palette and a yearning for the moist, hearty, flavorful rolls Sheetz had offered, you will probably have to arrange for a food lift from Philly. My recommendation to Sheetz, recognizing that people have varying tastes, is that they include an option on their menu for either roll type. Heck, I'll even let them call my favorite, "The Philadelphian!"

Love Consulting  
600 Oakmont Place  
Roaring Spring, PA 16673  
814-224-2651

articles@loveconsulting.com

© 2004 Love Consulting